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THE BEGINNING OF THE GERMAN IMMIGRATION IN THE MIDDLE WEST.

By JACOB W. MYERS.

In order to have a clearer and better understanding of this subject, I think we should go back somewhat over a part of the colonial history of America. The question of immigration, both past and present, has been and is yet one of vast importance to us as a nation. By way of comparison let us look first at the present day immigration. The class of people with which we have to deal today, is an inferior class from south Europe. They are mostly illiterate people, and as a whole not very desirable, and they aid very little, if any at all, in building up this nation. I am more inclined to think that they are a burden because they settle mostly in the large and already congested cities, and segregate themselves in certain quarters which become nurseries of crime; and their unsanitary habits breed infectious diseases. One of the greatest problems we have today is the policing and sanitation of the large cities, due mostly to the foreign elements in them.

I have tried in a few words to sketch the present day immigration. Now let us look at the early or colonial immigration. It is altogether a different type of people. The early immigrants came from north Europe. They were for the most part a thrifty, energetic people, many of whom perhaps had made failures in the old world, due not to a lack of thrift, but to oppressions of various kinds. They were seeking new homes where they could start anew, could own their homes, and could have wider liberties. They were welcome to these shores, because there was plenty of room, and the few already here were glad to have someone with whom they could league for mutual protection against the common foe, the Indian. It is true, however, that there were a few from south Europe in the early immigration, but they failed to make a success.

We come now to take up one particular branch of that colonial immigration namely, the Germans. The year 1700¹ may be said to be the beginning of foreign immigration. However there were a few scattering immigrants before then. By foreign immigration is meant all those peoples who are not English. The English forefathers were immigrants, but since they were the first settlers we do not speak of them as foreign immigrants. It will be remembered that after the War of the Palatinate Louis XIV ordered the Germans to leave, and thousands of them fled across the channel to England.² Queen Anne tried to provide for them and tried to help them. She sent a few to Ireland, about 4000 to New York and a few to North Carolina. Those who landed in New York were treated so illiberally that they removed to Pennsylvania, and settled in or near Germantown. After that most of the Germans who came over for a few years settled in Pennsylvania.

Between 1700 and 1710 there were two devastations of the Rhine Palatinate. William Penn visited that country and flooded it with literature about America, and offered several inducements for the Palatines to immigrate to America and to settle on his plantation. In 1807 then, began properly this exodus of Germans. Besides Penn, other land owners and several ship owners advertised this country in Germany, and thousands of the poorer Germans, whose property had been devastated, were induced to indenture themselves to the settlers and the ship owners. The ship captains auctioned them off to the settlers in payment for transportation. Thus they had a job as soon as they landed. Others were not afraid to come, because they were certain of finding employment. Probably about one-half of the immigrants of the colonial period came over under this system.³

It must not be understood that there were no Germans before 1700, because there were a few. In 1683 they settled Germantown near Philadelphia.⁴ These Germans established small manufactures where they made on a small scale paper, glass, knit goods, and coarse cloth. They were also good

¹ R. G. Thwaites. *The Colonies*.

² John R. Commons. *Races & Immigration in America*, page 30.

³ John R. Commons, *Races & Immigration in America*, page 30.

⁴ R. G. Thwaites, *The Colonies*, page 228.

tanners and cheese makers. They opened up an inland trade which had for its center Baltimore, a town well situated for the industry. From it as a center products could be carried to the outer world or by boats on the rivers to the interior.

These indentured farmers who settled in this region around Philadelphia and Germantown worked out their freedom, and then took up land for themselves, cleared away the timber and began cultivation and improvement of it. Many of them moved to what was then the western borders of Pennsylvania, where because of a peculiar dialect which they evolved they were known as "Pennsylvania Dutch."⁵

The Germans were good pioneers to advance civilization and improve land, but they were hardly the people for a frontier country where it was necessary to fight back the Indians, because they disliked to bear arms. During the early wars they were of little or no fighting service. At the time of the French and Indian War there was a line of German settlements from the Mohawk Valley to Georgia. But just west of these were those settlements of the rugged, liberty-loving Scotch-Irish, who were not afraid to fight, in fact, they really loved to fight, and it was they who were capable of driving back the Indian and who pushed on farther to the west, thus opening up new lands for settlement.

Later on we shall see that it is a different type of Germans who came over. From now on we have the Germans coming at different times, as 1729, 1734.⁶ In 1749-54 about two thousand of Germans landed in America. By the time of the Revolution there were about one hundred thousand Germans here. They were settled mostly along the coastal plain and particularly in Pennsylvania. The reason for this is because many were indentured and had to work here, and many disliked to bear arms, hence remained in the settled portions. But later on we find many of these leaving the east for the new west where they could get more and cheaper land. The children of many of these were much unlike their parents, because they had grown up under different conditions. Many of the young Germans served in the Civil War.

We have now seen the German immigration in the colonial time and seen that settlements were made mostly on the

⁵ R. G. Thwaites, *The Colonies*, page 222.

⁶ J. Windsor, *Narrative & Critical History*, Vol. 5, page 345.

coastal plains, and that later the settlers pushed into the middle west. We are now ready to look at the German immigration which went directly into the middle west. We may name 1833 as the date which marks the beginning of this second exodus.

There are two kinds of people who settled in this western region. The first were those who had been indentured and had worked out their freedom; because the coastal plains were already thickly settled, and land was high there, considering the price of western land, and the Indian was no longer giving much trouble in the west. Many of the Germans who had no land came west, and many who had land in the east sold it to come west to buy more and cheaper land. They settled in Ohio, Indiana, and Illinois. But it is not so much with these that we are concerned as with those who came directly from the Fatherland to the middle west. Yet we cannot deny the fact that those Germans who first settled in the east and then came west produced some effect upon the customs, habits, and politics of the west. Many of the people of southern Indiana were those who came from Pennsylvania by way of flat-boats down the Ohio River. These flat-boats were large enough that the family, wagons, household goods and cattle could be brought on one boat.

Now let us turn to this other class of immigration. It is impossible for us to clearly understand the causes of this migration unless we know something of the temperament and character of the people, and the government under which they lived. We saw that the colonial immigration was induced on religious grounds, because of which Louis XIV ordered the people to leave, and we also saw that they were of the poorer class of people. The nineteenth century immigration was due to economical and political causes. From the Napoleonic Wars till 1848, when a great revolution occurred, the government of Germany was despotic in character, supporting an established church.⁷

During this same time was an extraordinary growth of the German universities, which as a result produced a class of educated liberals. Many of these liberals became political exiles, who came to America for refuge, and they brought

⁷ John R. Commons, *Races & Immigration in America*, pages 67-8.

with them their liberalism in politics and religion. They with their descendants have formed a sort of intellectual aristocracy in our American cities.

These liberals sprang from the middle classes in Germany. Later when the wars with Austria and France provoked the spirit of militarism, thousands of peasants and others fled from Germany to escape from military service. Many of these were young men who were nearing the age of military service, and when they left for America, Germany was robbed of a young and vigorous blood, which could easily be molded into the American spirit and which could help to build up the institutions of our country. Many of those who fled from the Fatherland to escape from military service were willing, even anxious and glad to join the Union army in the great Civil War to preserve the Union and to establish firmly equality and liberty for all classes. It seems strange, indeed, that they would flee from their native country to escape military service and come to a new country and take an active part in a war. But it is to be explained in this way: in the one they were not fighting for liberty of themselves or their fellowmen, but because of petty jealousies of some foolhardy Prince, which gained for him perhaps a crown, but for them nothing; while in the other case they were fighting for the preservation of that government under which they were to live, that government which had to be united to afford to them and their future generations protection from foreign foes, and to maintain that very liberty which caused them to leave the Fatherland, namely, liberalism in government.

These men were often the first settlers in some of our western counties, and in these cases we can clearly see the effect they later produced upon American politics and institutions. The first settlers of Washington County, Ohio were Germans. They came in the summer of 1833, from the neighborhood of Durkheim on the Rhine Palatinate. Thomas B. Macaulay while standing on the Geisberg eminence of the Black Forest range, overlooking the region called it "the garden of Europe." It was, indeed, a very beautiful place for a home, but a commotion among the peasantry for more liberty induced them to leave. This first uprising was only the symptoms of a greater insurrection which broke forth in

1848. This insurrection of 1848 gave a good cause for Carl Schurz and General Franz Sigel to come to America. I need not mention any distinctions which these men won, but their names are cited merely to show what kind of men some of these were who came in this later period. They were educated liberals and wanted to enjoy liberty.

The revolt which lead to the immigration of 1833 was started by two professors, Wirt and Siebenpfeiffer of Heidelberg, and some of their students. Professor Wirt in a speech in 1832, delivered at Homberg auf der Höhe, denounced the tyranny of the German government.⁸ He was imprisoned, and with that the liberals lost all hope of greater freedom in Germany, because they had lost a most valuable leader, and a leader is necessary in nearly all movements in order to accomplish anything. Naturally they turned toward America where the people had already thrown off the yoke of despotic rule and founded a republic based upon the fundamental principles that all men are free and equal and that just governments are founded upon the consent of the governed.

Many of these liberals embarked at once for America, landed at Baltimore and proceeded westward with their families along the great national highway. Settlements were made at various places along this highway, which may be easily located by the names given to towns and townships and even to some counties where they settled. We find that others came by way of water and settled near water, because the rivers were good highways to markets. Wherever they went they left their stamp upon the country.

These immigrants were men of thrift. They immediately cleared the forests away, began cultivation of the soil, which they by their judicious methods of farming, have continued to improve. They were a liberty loving people and have entered American politics, and have always been an aid in the onward march of civilization. They have been successful in all the vocations of life which they have taken up. They formed a substantial part of the entire population in 1833. During that same year not less than two hundred thousand Germans came to America.

⁸ Bernard Peters, *Ohio Archeological & Historical Society*, vol. 2, page 55.

During the first thirty three years of the nineteenth century about one twentieth of the entire population was foreign. A great part of these were Irish. They were inclined to linger about the cities of the east, but the Germans usually sought the remote west where they could take up land, clear it, cultivate it, improve it, and when the country became more thickly settled, they found themselves a class of well-to-do farmers, forming a great factor in the political and social affairs in the west.

The German carried with him to this interior his same patient and laborious habits which distinguished him in his native country. He is a peaceable, liberty loving citizen, and a judicious husbandman. The communities which he builds up, although strikingly characterized by national peculiarities, they are yet models of productive industry. Generally speaking the Germans gave elements of strength and stability to our population. They were of high character and intelligence. They left the Fatherland because their republican views were contrary to the German rule at that time.* They desired to find homes where they could better themselves materially and enjoy liberty. Many were graduates of the universities and gymnasia. They took keen interest in political affairs and many served in the Mexican and Civil wars. All assisted in building up the intellectual, moral and political conditions of the state and counties wherein they settled.

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* *Das Deutsche Element*, page 245-247.

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